

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE BUDGET

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the budget that is before the Congress, before the Senate, and before the American people. Like many others in this Chamber, as well as people from across the country, we look forward to working with President Obama to get this budget passed.

When we consider what a budget is, I believe it is a lot of things, of course, but it is not just a series of proposals and policies and numbers and charts and data. I believe a budget is really a reflection of our values. It is a mirror into which we look—at least here in the Federal budget—once a year to make an assessment or a reassessment of our values and our priorities. I think President Obama understands that. His budget reflects that understanding; that a budget is a set of values and priorities, and in the end it is also about people. It is not just about data and programs, but a budget is about people.

I was thinking this morning about some people with whom I have had contact through correspondence—people who write to our office and talk about their lives—such as Trisha Urban, who wrote to our office not too long ago. She is from Berks County, the county that has the city of Redding in it, on the eastern side of our State.

Trisha has a story about her life, her family, and about health care. Imagine this happening, Mr. President, in the life of one family—in this case Trisha Urban's family. Trisha was pregnant and awaiting the birth of a child, and at the same time her husband dies, literally within the same timeframe. She wrote to me and said:

We were anxiously awaiting the birth of our first child. A half hour later, two ambulances were in my driveway. As the paramedics were assessing the health of my baby and me, the paramedic from the other ambulance told me that my husband could not be revived.

This happened all in 1 day, all in 1 hour, literally.

She goes on to say in her letter:

My husband's death may have been prevented. Like many other Americans, we have difficulty with our health insurance. My husband had to leave his job for 1 year to complete an internship requirement to complete his doctorate in psychology. The internship was unpaid; we could not afford COBRA.

COBRA is the extension of health insurance. Continuing to quote her letter:

Because of preexisting conditions, neither my husband's health issues nor my pregnancy would be covered under private insurance.

And she goes on from there to talk about her own predicament. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the full text of this letter that I received from Trisha Urban.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

DEAR MR. CASEY, Exactly one week and 7 hours ago, I was frantically trying to revive my husband who was doing some last minute errands before taking me to the hospital. My water had broke the night before, we were anxiously awaiting the birth of our first child. A half-hour later, 2 ambulances were in my driveway. As the paramedics were assessing the health of my baby and me, the paramedic from the other ambulance told me that my husband could not be revived.

My husband's death may have been prevented. Like many Americans, we have difficulty with our health insurance. My husband had to leave his job for one year to complete an internship requirement to complete his doctorate in psychology. The internship was unpaid; we could not afford COBRA. Because of pre-existing conditions, neither my husband's health issues nor my pregnancy would be covered under private insurance. I worked 4 part-time jobs and was not eligible for any health benefits. We ended up with a second rate health insurance plan through my husband's university. When medical bills started to add up, the insurance company decided to drop our coverage stating the internship did not qualify us for the benefits. We were left with close to \$100,000 worth of medical bills. Concerned with the upcoming financial responsibility of the birth of our daughter and the burden of current medical expenses, my husband missed his last doctor's appointment less than one month ago. I am a working class American and do not have the money or the insight to legally fight the health insurance company. We had no life insurance. I will probably lose my home, my car and everything we worked so hard to accumulate in our life will be gone in an instant.

If my story is heard, if legislation can be changed to help other uninsured Americans in a similar situation, I am willing to pay the price of losing everything. I am asking you to share my story with others in Congress and I am willing to speak on behalf of my husband so that his death will not be in vain.—Trisha Urban

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, here is how Trisha Urban concluded her letter. She said:

If my story is heard, if legislation could be changed to help other uninsured Americans in a similar situation, I am willing to pay the price of losing everything. I am asking you to share my story with others in Congress and I am willing to speak on behalf of my husband so that his death will not be in vain.

In this one single letter from a woman in Pennsylvania, a mother and now a widow, is contained all the challenges that we face in this budget, specifically with regard to health care. But I think it speaks to so many other challenges we face as well. So every budget we do, and especially at this time of economic crisis, is about people, and we all have to remember that.

I think President Obama understands this budget is about people—it is about people who are leading lives of struggle and sacrifice and setback. But at the

same time he understands the American people, even at this difficult time in our Nation's history, understand we will overcome this. We will pass a budget, and we will get to work on these important priorities—priorities such as health care, the priority of education, and also of making progress on a whole range of energy issues.

As we are passing this budget, we should remind the American people that even as we work on health care, energy, and education, this budget contains plenty of middle-class tax relief, and it is important to talk about that.

Now, I don't want to look in the rear-view mirror and talk about the past too much, but I think it is important to provide a brief assessment of where we are. We can't make progress ahead of us if we don't know where we are and where we have been. Here is where we have been the last couple of years.

The prior administration inherited a \$236 billion surplus. When the prior administration ended, it was the exact opposite—record deficits at that time. The Congressional Budget Office projected the surplus—this is back in the early part of this decade—the projection was the surplus would grow at \$710 billion—a surplus of \$710 billion—by 2009. We know that is not the case today.

President Obama and the American people have inherited a deficit of almost \$1.3 trillion. If you look at it in terms of gross debt, it is like looking at the side of a mountain. We went from \$5.8 trillion up to over \$12 trillion in debt. That is what we face. And I think it is important to understand that is where we start.

But President Obama didn't spend a lot of time talking about the problem he inherited, he focused on solutions. So he put before the Congress an open, honest, and accountable budget. This is a budget that will come about because of his work and his leadership as President but also the work that Chairman KENT CONRAD and others in Congress do. I want to commend Chairman CONRAD for the work he has done on this budget. He has a great array of charts we are going to be using in the next couple of days to highlight some of these issues.

But this is an honest budget. It is not perfect, but it is honest, and it focuses on those priorities I mentioned before—health care, energy, education, deficit reduction, and tax relief.

Let me take a couple of moments to talk about health care. The story I told before, encompassing the letter from Trisha Urban, is an unusual story, a graphic and difficult story to tell about tragic events in the life of one family. But the problems that families are having with health care are not all that unusual. For the first time in a decade, we have a budget that tackles one of the biggest problems in the country—the health care crisis. We can't put it off to 2010, 2011, or 2012. We have to deal with this now, this year, with a new President and a new Congress committed to doing that.

Across Pennsylvania this issue comes up all the time when I talk to people in our State. If you look at it in terms of the Nation, there are nearly seven times the number of Americans without health insurance today as there were in 2000. Families USA is an organization that analyzes health care in the country, and then they focus specifically on a particular State. The most recent report of Families USA finds that nearly 3 million Pennsylvanians under the age of 65 were uninsured for some period of time in 2007 and 2008. The overall number of Pennsylvanians without health insurance is growing faster than the nationwide average.

So we have a major challenge on our hands with regard to health care, and the President has been very focused on making sure health care is a major component of this budget. We are going to be talking about the specifics of that in the days ahead.

The President also made a strong commitment to energy independence. We all know it is important. We know it is an urgent priority, and we have talked a lot about it—year after year of talking and not acting, year after year of explaining the problem instead of putting the solutions into law, into the budget, into the programs we know can work.

Energy independence is not just a nice thing to do, it is not just another way to go about heating our homes and powering our economy. Energy independence is essential for our national security. The more we ignore it, the less safe we are. The more we ignore energy independence, the more the terrorists have an increasing advantage over us. We have to deal with this this year as well. We are dependent for oil on some of the most politically unstable areas of the world. We know that, but we can't just acknowledge that, we have to act on it.

This budget addresses the need for investments in clean energy that will help us combat global warming and create the new green jobs of the future—not just any jobs, the green jobs that will pay wages on which you can sustain a family.

This budget, with regard to energy, builds on the investment we made through the recovery and reinvestment bill we passed not too long ago, for renewable energy, energy efficiency and conservation, electric grid modernization, and low-carbon coal technology, which is so important for our transition to this new energy economy.

I wish to conclude today by addressing the issue of education. We know that the challenge we have with regard to education is a lifetime of challenges, and we have to think about education as a continuum, a continuing series of challenges we have to face as Americans.

We cannot say we want a growing economy or higher GNP growth or a skilled workforce to compete in the world economy—we cannot really say

that with any degree of truth or integrity unless we are willing to make investment in children in the dawn of their lives. As Hubert Humphrey said a long time ago—he talked about how the test of government is how we treat those in the dawn of life, the shadows of life, and those in the twilight of life. When he spoke of the dawn of life, of course he was speaking of our children.

The United States of America today has no prekindergarten education policy beyond the important program of Head Start. But we have to not just make the funding commitment to Head Start, which has been so important to our economy and to our children and our families, we have to do more than Head Start. We need a full commitment to prekindergarten education—early learning. President Obama understands that. He campaigned on it. He promised the American people he was going to work on it, and he put it in his budget. It is so critically important to make this a priority in our budget. But he knows that making sure a child has access to early education and health care and the promise of a bright future will not reach fulfillment unless we invest in higher education as well. Access to higher education and the opportunities it affords is one of the fundamentals of what makes this country strong. I really believe his commitment on higher education is a seminal part of his budget.

But I really believe also that when President Obama talks about education, he is not just talking about it in some abstract form. When he focuses on the needs of our children, it is not an abstraction—not only because he is a husband and a father but because President Obama believes, as I believe, that every child in America, no matter where they live, no matter who they are, no matter who their parents are, every child in America is born with a bright, scintillating light inside them. It is up to us, those of us who are elected officials, who are given power to help people, who are given power to get things right in this country as best we can, it is up to us to make sure that whatever that light is inside a child, it burns ever brighter, that that child's full potential—if it is unlimited or if it is much more limited—whatever that potential is, whatever the brightness of that light is, we have an obligation here to make sure that potential, that light burns brightly. I really believe what President Obama has tried to do on education speaks directly to that obligation we have as Members of the Senate or Members of Congress.

We have a lot more to talk about in the days ahead. We have a lot more challenges to face as we face the challenge not only of passing a budget but of making sure these programs work for people. But in the end, this is about people. It is about Trisha Urban and families who face the impossible challenge of having health care for their family. It is also about a lot of families in Pennsylvania and across the country

who lost their homes, may have lost their jobs, and have lost their hopes and their dreams.

I believe with all my heart that this budget is one of the ways we speak to their concerns, one of the ways we do our best to speak to the worries they have about their own future, one of the ways we give integrity to the promise we have when we say we are working here to make sure the families of America can reach their potential: that children's lives will be better than their parents' lives. There are many people worried about that basic feature of American life.

This budget is not perfect. We will continue to work on it. I and others will have amendments, but President Obama has put us on a path to make the investments in health care, education, and energy; to cut the deficit in half; to provide tax relief; and also by making those investments to put us on a path not just to getting our economy out of the ditch and back on the road but making sure we are making the investments to grow our economy in the future—to create jobs, to create opportunity, and to create a future for our families and especially for our children.

We have a long way to go, but I really believe President Obama—working with leaders such as Chairman CONRAD here in the Senate and others in the House as well to make sure we are on that path to fiscal responsibility—is on the path to investing in priorities such as health care, education, and energy. If we work together, we can reestablish the kind of economy we used to have and reestablish and reenergize the priorities the American people elected us to work on. I know we can do that together, but it is not going to be easy. We look forward to the challenge. We look forward to working with President Obama.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call roll.

Mr. ENZI. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. GILLIBRAND). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

NATIONAL SERVICE REAUTHORIZATION ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 1388, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1388) to reauthorize and reform the national service laws.